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ABSTRACT

A practicum was conducted at a small, private elementary school to introduce strategies that would reduce kindergarten classroom disruptions and playground disturbances due to fighting, verbal confrontations, and disregard for authority and rules. A survey conducted at the school revealed that kindergarten teachers handled a daily average of 10 disruptions in their classroom without making referrals to the administration. Causes of the problem were identified by observations, interviews with staff, daily checklists, and the teacher survey, indicating that the lack of nonviolent problem-solving skills was a major contributor to the frequency of classroom disruptions. A four-step method of conflict resolution was used, along with open-ended stories, art, music, and role play, to teach children to identify their emotions and settle conflict situations nonviolently. Choices of appropriate methods of problem evaluation, recognition of emotions, and acceptance of responsibility for actions were sequentially presented using small- and large-group interaction and role playing. The study population consisted of 25 kindergarten students. Results of a post-intervention teacher survey revealed a positive trend toward the reduction in the number of disruptive incidents requiring teacher intervention, as well as an increase in the number of incidents children were able to resolve successfully on their own. (AC)

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# Increasing the Growth in Prosocial, Nonviolent, Problem - Solving Skills of Kindergarten Students Through Conflict Resolution Skills

Janet M. Benton-Murray

Cluster 60

A Practicum I Report Presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Educaton

Nova Southeastern University
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This practicum report was submitted by Janet M. Benton-Murray under the direction of the advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed. D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova southeastern University.

Approved:

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To the faculty of Nova Southeastern University who demand the highest level of professionalism of their students, I offer my respect and admiration. To challenge without killing spirit is a difficult task. Only a university that is dedicated to innovatively molding the highest qualified, committed professionals for the future is able to maintain such a delicate balance with infinite skill.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the role my family played in giving me the loving support necessary to continue this project in the face of many obstacles. Their generosity, acceptance, and encouragement of my need to pursue this degree has been an invaluable inspiration. I love them beyond my ability to express in words.

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ABSTRACT

Increasing the Growth in Prosocial, Non-violent, Problem-solving skills of Kindergarten students Through Conflict Resolution Skills. Benton-Murray, Janet M., 1994: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Social Adjustment/ Problem Solving/ Prosocial Behavior/ Social Development/ Interpersonal Competence/ Conflict Resolution.

This practicum was designed to reduce classroom disruption and playground disturbances due to fighting, verbal confrontations, and disregard for authority figures and classroom rules which required teacher intervention. Twenty-Five Kindergarten students attending a small private elementary school were selected as the target population.

The writer combined open-ended stories, art, music, role play, and the use of a four step method of conflict resolution skills to teach children to identify their emotions and settle conflict situations nonviolently. Choices of appropriate methods of problem evaluation, recognition of emotions, and acceptance of responsibility for actions were sequentially presented using small and large group interaction and role playing.

Analysis of the data revealed a positive trend toward the reduction in the number of disruptive incidents requiring teacher intervention as well as a trend in the increase in the number of incidents the children were able to successfully resolve on their own.

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July 1, 1994 Janet M. Benton-Murray

# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

## Description of the Community

To understand fully the problems faced in the small, exclusive, independent elementary school in the selected setting, one must become familiar with the character of the surrounding metropolitan area. The area was developed about 40 years ago, and has become a major urban center located in the southeastern United States with an approximate population of 1.3 million.

Because of its sophisticated nature, the area attracts a wide diversity of people from all over the world which lends an international flavor. Economically the area attracts the extremely wealthy as well as the near destitute. Culturally the area is very diverse. It is home to one Community College, local branches of two state Universities, as well as an innovative private University.

The students who attended the school came mainly from surrounding suburban areas. While the school's boundaries were not fixed, the students lived within a 30 mile radius preferring to bypass public schools in order

to provide what they perceived as a better education for their children. All students are brought to school in cars by their families as there are no busses.

The ethnic background of the school is predominantly white with only 3 percent minority students. The majority are from upper middle class economically privileged families, however some families made great sacrifices in order for their children to attend the school.

## Writer's Work Setting and Role

The independent elementary school enrolled students from the surrounding suburban areas which were comprised primarily of upper middle class families. The school has been in operation for 35 years and has been located in its present location for the past 15 years. It educates approximately 400 children ranging from pre-kindergarten to 5th grade. In addition to the traditional curriculum, the school incorporates the Montessori method, especially in the pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and lower grades. The unique blend of these two teaching models offers an active hands-on approach to learning which is reflected

in the scholastic accomplishments of the students.

The school as well as the parents have high academic expectations for the students and therefore pressure is placed on both the teachers and the students to produce academic excellence.

The writer was a kindergarten teacher with 5 years experience, and is professionally certified by the state. The other kindergarten and pre-kindergarten teachers hold Montessori degrees and therefore, the writer was responsible for overseeing the traditional curriculum provided in the 4 pre-kindergarten and 2 kindergarten classes. In addition, the writer functioned as a resource teacher for the team.

# CHAPTER II

# STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

## Problem Description

The problem experienced at the writer's school impacts education throughout the United States. Within the writer's school setting, classroom disruptions, verbal aggression, aggressive behavior on the playground, poor impulse control, trouble with peer interactions in general, and distractibility have been steadily increasing over the past several years. As a result valuable teaching time has been spent resolving classroom disputes and quelling disturbances. These behaviors affected the individuals actively involved, their classmates, teachers, and support staff as well.

There has been a marked increase in highly impulsive behaviors which were dangerous to self and others such as throwing objects, temper tantrums, and refusal to follow directions. These dangerous behaviors were being demonstrated by a greater number of children than in past years and they seemed to erupt with less cause.

One reason the problem has not been solved is that the school does not encourage any teacher referrals to

administration or parent contact to discuss problem behaviors. Teachers were expected to handle any misconduct within the classroom in a positive manner so as not to alarm or upset the parents. The school was basically operated as a business which viewed the parents as paying customers who must be kept satisfied. The members of the administration were not present at the school every day. This situation often resulted in an administrative void. In addition, many of the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten staff have received no training in dealing with complex behavior problems other than to use "time out".

Another reason for the continued existence of the problem was the permissive attitudes of parents or lack of ability to effect a change in their children. Often parents were unable to discourage behaviors in their children which they displayed in their own lives. Some of the aggressive behaviors demonstrated by the children typified the type A lifestyle reflected by their parents in their work habits. Many of these aggressive characteristics which may be desirable in the work setting were not conducive to good classroom learning situations. For a variety of reasons these and other

factors contributed to the problem. In short, the problem was that Kindergarten children showed no signs of growth in learning to resolve conflicts in nonviolent ways.

## Problem Documentation

Evidence of the problem was supported by a teacher survey of all the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers and the writer's observations. Kindergarten teachers handled an average of 10 incidents in their classrooms daily without referral to administration. This disruptive behavior by students interrupted valuable teaching time affecting the entire class. Student's impulsive behavior and low impulse control often resulted in conflict. A conflict was determined to be in progress if one child objected to, or retaliated against an action or verbalization by another child (Vespo & Caplan, 1993). A conflict could have arisen during individual skills practice over a minor thing such as which pencil to get from the pencil container in the middle of the group table. The unique and colorful designs of the pencils resulted in grabbing and pencil hiding.

Some students did not demonstrate age-appropriate social competence. Children who were unable to identify and follow the rules in social settings not only disrupted interactions but were apt to be judged as lacking social competence (Bremm & Erickson, 1977; Rogers & Ross, 1986). This is evidenced by some children's difficulty in such routine activities as sharing or taking turns with the manipulative materials in the classroom during the Montessori learning time. In addition, during snack time many of these children rushed and did not demonstrate good table manners while eating. Several of the students did not demonstrate prosocial actions, for instance, when walking down the hall some of the students would attempt to knock as many sweaters and coats from the rack as possible and then walk on then which resulted in a disruption if this action had been observed by the owner of the article. Therefore, the presence of inappropriate social skills was often the reason for children's trouble functioning in group activities necessary to the school experience.

Students who demonstrated low prosocial skills would typically loose interest midway through a group lesson or activity often playing with their shoes, clothing, or

hair,and in some cases, that of their neighbor. A prosocial skill was defined as an act that aids or benefits someone else. These skills were viewed as central to a child's social competence (Doescher & Sugawara, 1989). Thus short attention span, high desire for instant gratification combined with a high degree of restlessness created a situation in which these children were failing to acquire good listening skills necessary for success in school.

The writer's personal observations of students in group activities indicated students' inability to recognize problem situations, the lack of understanding of nonviolent solutions, and personal dynamics involved in confrontational situations. If the students possessed these skills many of the conflicts that arose in the classroom and on the playground could be have been avoided before they had a chance to escalate. Some children refused to share possessions, toys, or classroom equipment and were unwilling to take turns. This behavior was characterized by a "you first, right after me" attitude toward others. In addition, these students often demanded instant gratification from parents, teachers, and other school personnel. If the child did

not get his/her way a temper tantrum often resulted.

## Causative Analysis

The causes of this problem at the writer's school setting were identified by observations, interviews with kindergarten staff, daily checklists, and results of the teacher survey. These factors combined to pinpoint the lack of nonviolent problem solving skills as a main contributor to the frequency of the disruptions in the classroom as well as the confrontations on the playground. Arguments between students often spread to teachers and other staff for intervention. Verbal confrontations including name calling often escalated into throwing things, hitting, kicking, biting, scratching, and pushing.

Aggressive behaviors are learned by imitating role models found in the home, peers, neighborhoods, and TV. Aggressive and competitive personality character traits are demonstrated by certain parents leading to a competitive lifestyle. Some of these characteristics that contribute to success in the work place often do not translate into successful characteristics in a school

setting. This generation of parents is raising type A tots- kids who are fast paced, competitive, and aggressive (Elder, 1988). Children today are exposed to experiences that encourage competition, self-indulgence, and aggression.

In addition, children are also exposed to background anger which is sometimes evident within the family unit or its extensions. The family unit is breaking up and adults have trouble dealing with the resulting anger successfully and the children involved often don't understand the situation and feel helpless causing them to seek other outlets for their feelings. Often this other outlet is the classroom.

Another source of aggression stems from children being allowed to watch inappropriate TV programming and movies, as well as playing video games that depict violence in glamorous ways. In some of these video games a player can only advance to a higher level by demonstrating violence.

The writer's recent discussions during parent-teacher conferences revealed the parents lack of knowledge about prosocial problem-solving skills and the importance of teaching these skills to their children.

These parents therefore exhibited anti-social attitudes and behaviors to their children. In a variety of ways the parents of children who lacked problem-solving skills appear to demonstrate an inability to effectively deal with their children. As a result, some parents offered the school minimal support. Others appeared to be unwilling to deal with their children's behavior. Many parents offered time constraints as an excuse not to deal with the problem. These parents rushed through the driveway for the morning drop off and were impatient during the afternoon pick-up times. Still others did not keep scheduled conferences to discuss problem behavior. Finally, some parents refused to give up their time because they had set other priorities for themselves.

Many parents tried to deal with their children, but their efforts were not consistent resulting in a sort of "Band-Aid" effect which alleviated the problem temporarily. These parental attempts lacked the consistency and perseverance necessary for success. In addition, the children were perceptive to parental weaknesses and shortcomings. If the weak and ineffectual attempts on the part of the parent create an authority void, the child will fill the void in an aggressive

manner, thereby rewarding, not extinguishing such aggressiveness; the exact opposite of what the parent was attempting to accomplish.

## Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

There is an abundance of current literature addressing the problem of children's lack of prosocial skills and expertise in dealing with conflict in non violent ways. The United States is now the most violent nation in the world leading the industrialized world in homicides, rapes, and assaults (NAEYC, 1993).

Aggression involves complex behavior patterns acquired by the individual by interactions with the environment (Bandura, 1977, 1979; Hall & Cairns, 1984). The child needs to understand what violence is and how to recognize it in their lives (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992; Parry, 1993). Children need to realize that they have the power to choose and control their actions and reactions as well as to learn how to effectively use language to express their feelings, and protect and defend themselves in nonviolent ways. The writer consistently uses situations that arise within the

classroom to point out violence and the direct effects on the participants actions. Therefore, nonviolent outcomes in conflict situations is due in part to adult support early in the interactions and the teacher having a flexible set of strategies to use (Brophy, 1983; McNergney & Haberman, 1989; Larsen & Hartup, 1989; Crosser, 1992; Oken-Wright, 1992; Greenberg, 1992; Hostetler, 1992; Bernat, 1993). Within the context of social relationships, the individual's actions can be significantly altered by the responses of others. Conflict resolution skills are not automatically part of a child's repertoire; they must be taught and practiced. A child who has experienced, or believes from watching the actions of significant people achieve desirable things through the use of aggression, is more likely to choose aggression to achieve his/her own desires. If the child has experienced encouragement and approval for acts of aggression from parents or significant others, aggressive behaviors may be generalized to other areas. (Stocking, Arezzo & Leavitt, 1979; Hall & Cairns, 1984). In order to construct an understanding of violence they have seen, children are more likely to imitate what they have seen or heard rather than create their own play

(Howarth, 1989; Singer & Singer, 1990; Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992). This type of imitative play observed by the writer lacks imagination, rather it mimics the story plots and actions of cartoon characters or fairy tale characters. Aggressive play can often begin by playing Super heros or acting like Ninja turtles (Tuchscherer, 1988; Gronlund, 1992). The writer has observed that when the students begin playing Ninja turtles or practicing martial arts skills a conflict generally results, even if the cause is as simple as poor gross motor control resulting in physical contact.

Modeling is another method of acquiring social skills, thus when children are exposed to aggressive or violent models of conflict resolution, whether first hand or through TV, this behavior becomes part repertoire of responses to social situations (Bandura, 1977, 1979; Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992). Aggression can be modeled by parents, peers, teachers, or others who are in direct contact with the child. It can also be learned through social interactions with others which result in the child's expectations either being met or frustrated. Violence is a learned response that moves in a cycle from one generation to the next and that in order to break the

cycle the identification of alternatives and a positive educational approach are essential (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992; Parry, 1993). The core of moral behavior is the child's concern for the welfare of others and how they think about their social world is strongly tied to helpful and caring actions toward others (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow & King, 1979; DiMartino, 1987). Over time the child is exposed to a variety of problem-solving situations from a variety of role models. Those role models that hold the greatest emotional significance for the child are more likely to form the basis for the most significant socializing influence in the child (Bandura, 1977, 1979). The writer and other members of the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten team have discussed the observed similarities in the behaviors between the parents, older siblings, and the current kindergarten students in the school.

Prior to school entrance the child receives his/her primary socialization influence from the parents, and to a lesser degree from the environment and the media. When parents explain rules and give explanations for behaviors as they are taught this enables the child to become aware of rules and conventions. Rules and explanations

are a supplemental behavioral support for children who have seen appropriate behavior modeled.

Younger grade school children are less competent than older children at identifying the intentions of others and utilizing the information available to resolve conflict (Larsen & Hartup, 1989). However, when conflicts between young children arise, they are more likely to use conciliatory gestures to resolve conflicts with friends than they are with acquaintances (Howes, 1983; Vespo & Caplan, 1993). One can conclude that friendship provides a secure social context within which concepts and behaviors of cooperation, mutual respect, and interpersonal sensitivity are able to develop.

Parents, teachers, extended family members, primary care givers, peers, and neighbors function as the primary role models for elementary school aged children. Therefore, when aggression is modeled in the home it, becomes the strongest influence on the child's developing social skills. The Children's Defense Fund reports that an estimated 2.7 million children were reported to child protection agencies in 1991 as victims of neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional maltreatment (cited in NAEYC report reprinted in Young Children,

1992). If parents use aggression to solve problems, the children will also resort to aggression in order to solve their problems (Bandura, 1977, 1979; Griffin, 1987). If parents are passive and permissive, the child has no behavioral limits, causing the child to assume the his/her behavior is acceptable (Gray, 1981). Children need to realize that violence can hurt or destroy people and things. Children need to learn that people have the power to choose how they well act. Everyone gets angry and children need to understand that feelings are OK, but how we act on those feelings becomes important. The writer has observed behavior within her classroom that clearly demonstrated that some children act on their feelings before considering how their actions will be received and inevitably a conflict results.

As the child ages the parents and teachers are replaced as the primary role models by peers, entertainment heros, sports figures, TV and movie stars, and popular musicians who then become the primary socializers in the child's life. Children today spend more time watching television than attending school (Tuchscher, 1988; Singer & Singer, 1990). Children in the writer's classroom have reported staying up late at

night in order to watch TV programs or have seen movies with violent ratings that were inappropriate for viewing by kindergarten aged children. They also spend time acting out in great detail what they have seen while playing on the playground.

Childhood aggression is of great concern because it is a consistent predictor of behavior in adolescence as well as in adulthood. Patterns of social behavior including aggression are thought to be well established before the age of nine, and even very young children appear to be able to categorize social regulations into subcategories such as harm, convention, good sense, and school rules (DiMartino, 1987; Griffin, 1987). Therefore, early intervention is crucial for interrupting the acquisition of aggressive behaviors before they become too well incorporated into the child's behavior patterns. School children today are violent and resistant to changes in their behavior at an earlier age than ever before. While the more serious forms of aggression were not an immediate problem in the writer's setting, a brief discussion with other professionals in other local schools demonstrated that the problem does indeed exist in some schools.

Media created role models such as TV and movie stars, professional athletes, and major entertainment figures also shape children's behavior. As a result of deregulation of the broadcasting industry children's television and related toys have become more violent (Tuchscherer, 1988; Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1990; Carter, 1992). For instance, one need only check out the action figure isle in the local toy store to observe such items as figures from the Terminator or Alien movies, all of which carried R ratings and were unsuitable for young children to watch, yet the toys from these movies are approved for play by children aged 5 and up. It is not only the villain who is aggressive, but also the hero who uses violence to solve problems. Any single source of violence can exert a strong influence on the child and when it is combined with a mutually reinforcing environment, the effect increases geometrically.

When the child demonstrates a preponderance of aggressive behavior, he/she is often rejected by those peers who have been raised in non-violent homes. Children who have escaped exposure to violence hold different values and may seek to avoid or exclude the violent child. Therefore, when the violence-exposed

child attempts to interact with peers using his/her limited repertoire of inappropriate social skills, they may find their efforts rejected by children who have been taught a variety of prosocial problem-solving skills. Understanding and applying principles of cause-and-effect often prove to be difficult for the violence-compromised child who is accustomed to seeking immediate gratification and denying responsibility for actions. The writer had observed that the students in her classroom who lack appropriate social skills have had more difficulty admitting their actions or understanding the cause-and-effect relationship between their actions and the resulting conflict. The child's ability to predict social outcomes will improve as he/she becomes more competent in "reading" the feelings of others, understanding different points of view, as well as assessing the motives of others (Moore, 1979).

Very young children appear to have an intuitive ability to group social rules into categories such as harm, convention, good sense, and school rules in the same manner as adults. Most of the basic concepts of moral reasoning are in place by 5 years old (DiMartino, 1987). While "conflict" is viewed as a source of growth

aggression and violence are considered to be self-defeating patterns of behavior.

# CHAPTER III

# ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

## Goals and Expectations

The following goals and outcomes were projected for this practicum. The goals of this practicum were (1) to increase the growth of prosocial, nonviolent, problem-solving skills among kindergarten students; (2) to increase the strategies used to manage disruptive behaviors in the classroom; and (3) to decrease the number of disruptive situations requiring teacher intervention.

## Expected Outcomes

Outcome I anticipated a decrease in the number of incidents reported by the kindergarten teachers as measured by a teacher survey. An initial survey indicated that there were an average of ten incidents handled by teachers in their classrooms or on the playground daily without referral to the administration. It was estimated that at the conclusion of the practicum teachers would experience a decrease to no more than five

incidents per day in the classroom or on the playground.

The second outcome of this practicum was to increase the knowledge of prosocial, nonconfrontational, problem-solving skills as measured on a daily checklist. It was estimated that at the conclusion of the practicum the writer would observe the kindergarten students solving conflict situations without teacher intervention in no fewer than five situations per day. Teachers should model the enjoyable side of conflict and thereby provide a learning opportunity (Edwards, 1992). Often children's prosocial actions went unnoticed while the teacher attended to antisocial behaviors, however special attention was taken to recognize these actions on a daily basis. The writer's personal observations of students in group activities revealed student inability to recognize the probable effects of their actions, or their ability to successfully choose nonviolent solutions to the conflict situations in which they found themselves.

## Measurement of Outcomes

Outcome I utilized a brief survey given orally to the participating teachers on the pre-kindergarten and

kindergarten teaching team designed to measure the number of rule infractions handled daily during the time that the practicum was being implemented which required teacher intervention for resolution. The trends were recorded by class and type of infraction in order to determine the amount of improvement in each behavior.

Outcome II addressed the teacher's ability to implement a variety of solutions to help children resolve conflict situations in nonviolent ways. Teachers recorded daily infractions and then met with the writer to discuss long and short term nonviolent solutions to conflict. Short term solutions such as "time out" were already being successfully used in the classroom, however the practicum was designed to enable the teachers to move toward the implementation of long term solutions using constructive conflict resolution. These new methods needed to be taught to the children and took time and practice to develop. The daily checklist showed the children's improvement in long term creative solutions to conflict situations.

In addition, the first outcome of the practicum focused on the decrease in the number of disruptive incidents reported by the kindergarten teachers. This

outcome was measured by teacher observation and informal interviews with the other members of the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teaching team. The writer functioned as the referral person for the teaching team, therefore, the writer anticipated a decrease in the number of children referred to no more than two children per week. These informal observations by the writer provided additional evidence to support the observations made by other teachers.

# CHAPTER IV

# SOLUTION STRATEGY

## Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

In the writer's school setting aggressive behavior, such as classroom disruptions, verbal aggression, aggressive behavior on the playground, poor impulse control, trouble with peer interactions in general, and distractibility have been steadily increasing over the past several years. These behaviors not only effect those children actively involved in the conflict, but also their classmates, teachers and other support staff as well. In addition, valuable teaching time was lost. There has also been a marked increase in highly impulsive behaviors which are dangerous to self and others. These behaviors are being demonstrated by a greater number of children.

The search for a single solution to the problem of aggressive behavior had spawned several approaches depending on the primary cause of the aggression. Role play of conflict solutions for children to respond to and brainstorm possible solutions (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992; Crosser, 1992), open-ended stories depicting

conflict situations, teach conflict solution skills using the CNV (Choosing Non-Violence) model (Parry, 1993), teach peace within the classroom (Hostetler, 1992; Oken-Wright, 1992; Bernat, 1993), the use of Art therapy to enable the children to identify and defuse their strong negative feelings (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992), and using biblio-therapy by taking the conflicts depicted in books and stories as a method of allowing children to interact with conflict and possible solutions to it from a slightly removed position thus enabling them to feel more secure throughout the process (Howarth, 1989; Laursen & Hartup, 1989; Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992; Oken-Wright, 1992).

After reviewing the literature the writer realized that any solution selected had to include a component which enabled the teacher to examine and evaluate their own filters and agendas to successfully work through the tensions in conflict situations thereby allowing for a planned response from the teacher that would allow for student growth and learning. For instance, use of "time out" will stop conflict temporarily, however there is no provision for increased understanding and skill development so that the process won't be repeated over

and over (Carter, 1992).

Through the use of role play of conflict situations the teacher and students were able to suggest a variety of possible solutions in a nonthreatening way which allowed the child to model the behaviors. Behaviors that are practiced enough become part of the child's repertoire of behavior options. Children need to know that they will receive help they need to work out their conflicts successfully (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992).

The use of open-ended stories was similar to role-play in that the students were able to interact with conflict situations in which they were not actively involved and explore possible solution options. The same problem was used over and over again with different solutions posed and the children discussed which solution worked best.

Conflict resolution skills were taught using a four-step method: 1. define the conflict as a shared problem, 2. generate possible solutions on both children can agree, 3. assist the children to put their solution into practice, and 4. the participants need a chance to evaluate how the solution worked and how they feel about it.

Teachers were able to teach peace within the classroom by beginning with an attitude of trust, respect, and consideration for others. Teachers need to model respect of others and how to settle disputes without hurting one another.

Many children, who were at a stage where they could draw even simple representations, dictate or write simple stories found these means easier to think and talk about their conflicts. In this way, strong negative feelings were sometimes defused. The children were then able to share their drawings or stories with the group which increased learning opportunities. Curriculum activities sprang from these class discussions.

## Description of Selected Solution

Since no planned program for the development of prosocial problem-solving skills existed at the writer's setting, one was selected and developed that combined components from four of the approaches previously reviewed and described in order to create a unique and special approach which enabled students to develop prosocial, nonviolent problem-solving skills. The

concepts chosen for incorporation included:

1. Children's various learning styles were considered and in an effort to meet the needs of all the students it was decided to combine the methods of role-play, open-ended stories, and the student's own written and artistic work as a means of exploring possible solution options.

2. As the students became more proficient at applying prosocial nonviolent conflict solutions the teacher modeled the four step plan of conflict resolution skills using actual conflicts that occurred in the class and on the playground.

3. Throughout the entire practicum implementation experience the writer simultaneously introduced a unit on the special uniqueness of each student. The students explored how people were alike and different as well as the importance of those characteristics. Tolerance of differences were explored and respect for others was enhanced. This unit ran simultaneously with the Practicum because of the webbing effect it had on the curriculum.

The material was organized around a central theme with each week incorporating ever widening sub-themes.

Lesson plans were based on a problem-solving format that included identification of the component parts of the problem such as the "players" involved, the emotions, clues that helped them decide what was happening, generation of possible solutions other than aggression, identification of consequences, and selection of the most suitable means to achieve each child's identified needs.

Practice of acquired skills accompanied the introduction of each new sub-theme, reinforcing and strengthening new learning. Introduction of the concepts to the entire class was designed to give each student a common language which could be used to facilitate communication and increase peer approval of the selected problem-solving model. This was especially important since parents and community members were not familiar with the techniques introduced to the students. Continued reinforcement and true mastery depended on peer acceptance and use of the model.

## Report of Action Taken

A series of one-half hour lesson plans were

presented during a preassigned time, one each week for twelve weeks, to all students in the Kindergarten class. The class had 25 students ranging in age from 5 to 7 years old. The class was seated in the floor arranged in a circle and then if individual work was necessary to the lesson the children returned to their seats with materials after receiving instructions or participating in the discussion to stimulate creativity. The practicum was divided into three ever widening themes of self, family, and then culture and society. Each week had a theme topic. The writer introduced the theme or topic during the morning activities and then provided an opportunity to practice the skills learned each afternoon. Throughout the practicum process the writer's students focused on the weekly themes in addition to learning and applying pro-social skills as well as practicing nonviolent problem-solving strategies for conflict resolution.

The theme for weeks 1-4 was Self with weekly themes of self-knowledge, feelings, expressing emotions in appropriate ways, and understanding emotions.

During week 1 the topic was self-knowledge. The icebreaker lesson for the practicum involved the students

creation of a life-size portrait which they displayed at work around the room in such a way that they felt would represent themselves in the classroom setting and thereby demonstrating a knowledge of self. Then the students introduced themselves to the class using their portraits and described what they were doing and why they chose that particular activity. For example, one girl drew herself doing Math problems because she likes Math. Also at this time the initial teacher survey was completed by participating teachers.

The theme for week 2 was feelings. Following a morning discussion of emotions, the students listed as many feelings or emotions as they could and then used magazine pictures to create a collage of feelings to share with the class. Each child's contribution was validated aloud and written on the board as part of the group's efforts. When the children experienced difficulty articulating their thoughts, the writer prompted with key words as well as expanding previous suggestions to initiate further discussion. In addition, the teacher introduced fairy tales and other stories as a basis for exploring feelings and appropriate responses to conflicts found in the story. The writer had to begin

by talking about what "feelings" are and elaborating ways feelings differ from actions used to express them. The children discussed "feelings", what they are, what causes them, and that all feelings are legitimate while actions taken to express them may not be. Introduction of the concept of "actions" as differentiated from "feelings" provided the children with a dichotomy which was shown in two columns on the board. The children listed feeling words in one column, actions in the other. Repeated practice in differentiation was required. These two concepts were presented in a variety of ways in order to reinforce the concept. Work sheets, oral reviews, and sample scenarios requiring the students to identify and label feelings were utilized.

The first story used was Hansel and Gretel and it was so successful that the students wanted to rewrite it and change the ending. This technique allowed the students to begin to explore conflict situations in a nonthreatening way.

During week 3 the theme was expressing emotions in appropriate ways. The children practiced emotions involved in suggested scenarios and stories and evaluating the nature of the interaction as well as the

suggested solutions. The concepts of "staying in control" and "putting people first" require an ability to empathize with others while understanding and accepting responsibility for your own role in the situation.

The writer used songs and poems to further expose the children to emotions and introduce the concept that all people experience emotions, but deal with these emotions differently. The students made cards to give to family members or friends expressing their feelings.

The topic for week 4 was understanding emotions. The teacher introduced stories and conducted class discussions designed to enable students to begin to recognize their emotions. At first, the students had trouble correctly identifying and expressing emotions and separating them from the accompanying actions used to express the feelings, but as they became more comfortable expressing their feelings, role play of suggested situations allowed the students to demonstrate an understanding of their emotions.

The writer introduced exercises in identifying all the participants, both "major players" and "bystanders" in selected scenarios and the feelings and possible actions of each participant was discussed and charted on

the board. By dissecting each role in the given situation the children were able to clarify, review, and strengthen new concepts

The writer enlarged the students sphere of understanding of interpersonal situations by introducing the theme for weeks 5-9: Family and the weekly subthemes of love, forgiveness, anger, and rejection.

The theme for week 5 was love. The children used rhyming words to create a poem to express love. Then the students added the poem they had written to an art project which was then put together to form a class mural. One teacher lost her father that week and had to miss a lot of school, so the class created a card to tell her that they cared for her and missed her while she was away from the school.

The theme for week 6 was forgiveness. The children used actual situations found in the classroom or on the playground for a class discussion of forgiveness. The students role played conflict situations suggested by the writer using actual situations that had happened in a story or on a popular TV series that all of the students watched each morning before school to practice choosing appropriate solutions.

The topic for week 7 was anger. The children viewed the Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids video on anger and participated in a class discussion and then incorporate situations from the video to role play acceptable solutions. Anger was a strong emotion that was relatively easy for the students to identify and made role playing meaningful for them.

The topic for week 8 was rejection. The students discussed how it feels to be rejected or left out. The writer then introduced actual conflict situations involving rejections as a basis for role play which enabled the students to practice appropriate solutions.

The writer further expanded the students' understanding of interpersonal situations by introducing the theme for weeks 9-12: Culture and Society as well as the subthemes of different is OK, how we are all different and how we are all the same, different cultures represented in the classroom, and acceptance of others.

The theme for week 9 was different is OK. The teacher lead a class discussion on how each person is unique and different. The children then drew pictures of themselves and how they were uniquely special which was used as a class bulletin board.

The topic for week 10 was how we are all different and how we are the same. The children created a square for a class quilt using fabric paint which was displayed in the Kindergarten hallway of the school. The class also discussed acceptance of others even if they don't agree with them.

The theme for week 11 was different cultures represented within the class. The children expressed their own individuality by the creation a personal coat of arms which was displayed around the room. For snack time the students ate snacks from around the world representing a different country each day. In the afternoons the children sang songs from different countries.

The theme for week 12 was Acceptance of others. The writer lead a class discussion on acceptance of differences. In the wrap-up lesson for the practicum the children role played acceptance of differences and then they created a class peace proclamation that was exhibited in the main corridor of the school for a week. The final onsite task for the writer was to administer the post teacher survey to the participating teachers.

# CHAPTER V

# RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Results

The problem experienced in the writer's school impacts education throughout the United States. Within the writer's school there has been an increase in aggressive behaviors, an increase in the number of students who exhibit poor impulse control, distractibility, and trouble with peer interactions in general. The writer has observed a marked increase in highly impulsive behaviors which are dangerous to self and others such as throwing objects, temper tantrums, and refusal to follow directions. The problem has been allowed to continue because the school does not encourage any teacher referrals to administration, nor any parent contact regarding complaints about student behavior. Another reason for the continued existence of the problem is the permissive attitude of parents or the lack of ability to effect a change in the behavior of their children. In other words, the problem is that Kindergarten children show no signs of growth in learning to resolve conflicts in nonviolent ways.

After reviewing the literature the writer realized that the solution selected had to incorporate a variety of techniques and strategies because of the active and inquisitive nature of Kindergarten students. For this reason, the writer determined to teach prosocial skills through the use of a combination of role play, open-ended stories, discussion, self expression through art and writing, as well as conflict resolution skills. As the children became more proficient at applying prosocial, nonviolent conflict solutions the writer began to model the four step plan of conflict resolution skills using actual conflicts that occurred in the classroom or on the playground. Throughout the entire practicum experience the writer simultaneously introduced a unit on the special uniqueness of each student in order to help the children develop a sense of acceptance of others and a spirit of community within the class.

The first outcome for the practicum anticipated a decrease in the number of disruptive incidents requiring teacher intervention reported by the Kindergarten teachers as measured by a teacher survey. An initial survey of teachers revealed that teachers indicated there were an average of 10 incidents handled in their

classrooms or on the playground daily without referral to the administration. It was estimated that at the conclusion of the practicum teachers will have experienced a decrease to no more than five incidents per day in the classroom or on the playground. This outcome was achieved. In fact, the results surpassed the writer's expectations, as indicated by the teacher survey which was taken following the completion of the practicum revealing that the number of incidents handled by teachers both in the classroom and on the playground decreased to an average of two per day. (See Table 1).

TABLE 1

Comparison of Daily Pre, Mid, and Post Practicum Behavior Incidents Requiring Teacher Intervention to Resolve

| Pre | Mid | Post |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | 4 | 2 |

The second outcome of the practicum was to increase the knowledge of prosocial, nonconfrontational, problem-solving skills as measured on a daily checklist and through personal observations by the writer. This

outcome of the practicum was also achieved. The writer estimated that at the conclusion of the practicum, kindergarten students would be observed solving conflict situations in no fewer than five situations per day. That estimation proved accurate.

## Discussion

The results of this practicum validate those researchers who suggest that children need to acquire prosocial, nonviolent, problem-solving skills as a means of successfully dealing with conflict situations that arise within the school setting as well as in life in general (Laursen & Hartup, 1989; Carlson-Paige & Levin, 1992; Oken-Wright, 1992; Parry, 1993). In the writer's school aggressive behavior, such as classroom disruptions, verbal aggression, poor impulse control, distractibility, aggressive behaviors on the playground, and trouble with peer interactions in general have been demonstrated by a greater number of children and the frequency of occurrences have been steadily increasing over the past several years. A review of the data gathered during the implementation revealed an

interesting pattern. After implementing the practicum the writer's class demonstrated vast improvement in the use of prosocial, non-violent skills as a means of resolving conflict situations as compared to the other kindergarten class who did not use the practicum strategies. This trend in student behavior was noted by several teachers and resulted in the teacher of the non-participating Kindergarten class requesting a copy of the practicum lesson plans and use of the plans with the students in her classroroom. (See Table 2).

TABLE 2

Comparison of behaviors between the participating and the non-participating Kindergartens

| ROOM | PRE | MID | POST |
|---|---|---|---|
| P | 10 | 4 | 2 |
| NP | 10 | 12 | 12 |

* P= Participating room, NP= Non-participating room

The students in the writer's class demonstrated both

understanding and assimilation of the material as evidenced by changing behavior patterns recorded on the daily checklists and personal observations by the writer.

While general maturity level undoubtedly plays a significant role in the ability to assimilate and generalize the material being presented, class make-up should not be overlooked as a contributing factor. The writer's class consisted of twenty-five students with fifteen boys, all of whom exhibited aggressive and very physical behaviors both in the classroom as well as on the playground.

Dysfunctional behavior within a given class may also be the product of the academic readiness of the children to learn. Current trends toward non-retention, homogeneous grouping without subsequent change in teaching style, and mainstreaming of exceptional students can dramatically impact a class's ability to progress academically. The child who is over placed finds acceptance and significance through methods other than academic excellence. In those children, behavior will undoubtedly continue to be a problem regardless of non-academic interventions.

The search for a single solution to the problem of

aggressive behavior has yielded several approaches depending on the root cause of the aggression. After reviewing the literature the writer felt that the solution chosen would have to reflect a mulitfacited approach to the problem. Initially the writer chose to use biblio-therapy by taking the conflict situations presented in familiar stories as a nonthreatening way of allowing the students to interact with the conflicts and explore possible solutions from a slightly removed perspective based on the research by Howarth, 1989; Larsen & Hartup, 1989; Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992; Oken-Wright, 1992).

One unpredicted outcome was the marked change in teacher attitude toward students. Peace was taught and modeled in the classroom (Hostetler, 1992; Oken-Wright, 1992; Bernat, 1993) and conflict resolution skills were taught using the CNV: Choosing Non-Violnece model (Parry, 1993). The teachers reported using the sequencing and strategies from the model to help students resolve situations before those minor problems disintegrated into serious confrontation. The dramatic change in behavior suggests that the children's lack of prosocial skills exists because no other method of resolving problems has

been taught effectively by either the parent or the school. On some level the children must recognize their behaviors as inappropriate and non-productive in order to have participated so actively and made so many dramatic changes in such a short a period of time.

During the early part of the implementation phase of the practicum, the writer had begun to discuss the daily episodes of The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers with various students in class because of the vast appeal it had for them. This proved to be a blessing in disguise when the lesson on anger using the Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids video fell flat because the students had difficulty identifying with it. The episode on TV that morning had dealt with the theme of anger and because the writer as well as the entire class had watched the program the writer was able to shift the focus of the class discussion from the video to the TV show and proceed as planned.

One morning another teacher who was responding to personal stress in a poor way rushed into the writer's class during the middle of the practicum lesson which was a class discussion on "feelings" and "actions". She verbally confronted the writer's co-teacher in front of

the writer and the students. The situation presented a very "teachable moment" but also posed ethical considerations. Eventually both teachers were able to gain control and calmly apologize. This incident enabled the writer to demonstrate to the students that even adults can argue violently and yet be able to forgive each other and get along well afterwards.

The most meaningful lesson of the practicum for the writer was the production and assembling of the Peace quilt. The use of Art after the class discussion allowed the students to identify their emotions, uniqueness, and special qualities and express them with fabric paint and markers on cloth squares (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992). Even though the process was detailed, time consuming, and complicated it went very smoothly, parental involvement and student pride in their work was at an all time high. The quilt was displayed in the main hallway of the school and attracted a great deal of attention. It is now displayed on a wall in the writer's home.

## Recommendations

Based on experiences gained through the implementation of this practicum, three recommendations seem appropriate.

1. The teaching of prosocial skills needs to be part of the Kindergarten curriculum from the beginning of the year. If the students are able to learn and practice prosocial skills at the beginning of the year they will have more time to practice them and have the appropriate skills and behaviors reinforced.

2. In order to make newly acquired skills develop into more permanent habits, it is important to continue to reinforce, reteach, and renew old concepts. Since many of the concepts that form the basis for the model used in the practicum were difficult for the children to master and apply, as seen in the amount of time spent initially laying groundwork, a plan to continue to practice, review, and increase familiarity with the plan needs to be developed and implemented.

3. Finally, it is recommended that a formal follow-up including collection of new data be implemented in approximately three months, and then again in six months.

If the changes measured for this report continue, one might assume that negative social and aggressive behaviors were altered by the introduction of this model.

## Dissemination

Because of the teachers' enthusiastic acceptance of the model used in the implementation, it was decided to disseminate the results of the practicum to three audiences. First, those teachers who participated in the project, as well as other interested faculty, will be given a brief follow-up workshop on the impact of the material on behavior. In addition, copies of the practicum will be kept in the school's professional library for check-out.

Secondly, an introduction to the literature impacting this practicum, a discussion of the findings, and detailed lesson plans will be made available to teachers within the writer's professional group. Additionally, a copy of the entire practicum will be made available to interested teachers and parents at the school.

Finally, a copy will be forwarded to the local

Chairperson of the Association of Independent Schools for the state with permission for dissemination wherever appropriate.

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# APPENDIX A

Teacher Survey

Please complete the following survey on the students in your class.

Student Evaluation

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The child is friendly and outgoing. | A | S | N |
| 2. Follows directions appropriately | A | S | N |
| 3. Joins in group activities | A | S | N |
| 4. Shares toys with others | A | S | N |
| 5. Is kind to others | A | S | N |
| 6. Is patient and takes his/her turn | A | S | N |
| 7. Speaks kindly to others | A | S | N |
| 8. Appears to be happy | A | S | N |
| 9. Plays sociably | A | S | N |
| 10. Shows empathy when someone is hurt | A | S | N |

A= Always

S= Sometimes

N= Never